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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on the enigma of Casper Hauser (1812-1833), a child isolated from human contact for the first sixteen years of life. Upon his release (from incarceration in a cell), on the streets of Nurnberg, Germany in 1828, at the age of sixteen, he could barely walk, and could not talk. Although he appeared completely retarded, his senses were extremely acute; he possessed unusual sensitivity toward animals, people and metals. He had a phenomenal memory. After several years of socialization and education with an adopted family in Nurnberg, he learned to write, read, speak, calculate, paint and draw and to participate in the social activities and games of his time. He became a subaltern clerk at the local court of justice in Ansbach. Casper Hauser's remarkable recovery from sixteen years of utter isolation (with only a diet of bread and water), contradicts all other historical and recent case studies that show the effects of early isolatien are irreversible. In many cases, infants died from maternal deprivation. How did Casper Hauser manage to recover? His recovery is an enigma. (Author/RH)

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CASPER HAUSER: AN ENIGMA IN HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Earl J. Ogletree

On May 26, 1828, Casper Hauser mysteriously appeared on the streets on Nurnberg, Germany from nowhere. Although he was sixteen years of age, he could barely walk (he toddled like a one year old), could not speak a language and had the mind of a one year old infant. Wassermann (1963, p. 10), described him: "He seemed to hear without understanding, to see without perceiving, and to move his feet without knowing how to use them. . ."

Standing in the middle of one of the town squares like a lost child, he had no identification on his person except an unsigned letter addressed to Cavalry—Captain Wessinger that read: "I am sending you a boy, Captain, who wishes to become a soldier and to serve his King faithfully . . ." (Pies, 1966, p. 50). Apparently, the author of the letter had hoped the boy would be absorbed unnoticed into the population of Nurnberg. The relative small size of the city and Casper Hauser's extraordinary condition precluded the author's wishful thinking.

Not able to speak intelligibly, except for moans and animal-like noises, he was given a pencil and paper. Astonishingly, he scribbled his name, Casper Hauser (translated from German means "King in the house", which will have meaning later on in this paper). This threw no immediate light on his identity.

Who was Casper Hauser? From where did he come? Casper Hauser was not only an enigma of his time but is still so today. Apparently, he had been incarcerated for all or most of sixteen years in a dark cell or dungeon, with very little contact with human being or the outside world before his appearance in Nurnberg. After his release, he lived in Nurnberg for almost four years and in Ansbach for two years where on December 14, 1833, at the age of twenty-one, he was murdered in the park by an unknown stranger. His memorial tablet in the park reads: "Occultus, occulto occisus est — The unknown murdered by a hand unknown." His murder was never solved.

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During his five years in civilization, Casper Hauser became the most talked about child in Europe. Hundreds of articles, books and songs were written about him. He became known as the "Child of Europe." The controversy surrounding Casper Hauser not only involved his assumed relationship to the Throne of Baden, but that he possessed extraordinary sensorial capacities and that he rapidly developed from an animalistic state to that of a product human being. It is astonishing that at the age of sixteen, a rather late period in life, Casper Hauser learned to speak, write, read and to calculate. He could also paint and draw well. He learned to socialize; he acted on the stage, attended parties, danced and played the common games of his time. In Ansbach, he worked and held the position of subaltern clerk at the local court of justice in Ansbach.

Let us now examine Casper Hauser's period of incarceration, his special characteristics and his remarkable development.

CASPER HAUSER'S DEVELOPMENT

When Casper Hauser made his appearance in Nurnberg in 1828, he was like a very small child. He was of normal height and growth and stocky built. He could barely walk on his bleeding feet, the bottoms of which were as soft as the inside of the hands, indicating he had never walked or worn shoes. He toddled and stumbled constantly. His knees were of a peculiar structure, indicating that he had always been sitting or lying with stretched legs, which he later confirmed (Stibbe, 1928, p. 13).

The cell in which he was kept was semi-dark or dark; no light or sound penetrated it. In February, 1829 (nine months after his release from

the dungeon), he wrote the following simple account of his experience:

> The prison in which I was forced to live . . . was about six to seven feet long, four feet wide and five feet tall. The floor was covered with straw on which I sat and slept. My legs from the knees downward were covered with a rug. Next to my den, there was a hole in the floor and in it was a pot. My clothes consisted of a shirt and a pair of shorts . . . the hind part of which was cut out so that I could relieve myself. . . My food was bread and water. I had two wooden horses and a little dog to play with and a few ribbons of blue and red color which I used to trim my toys. When I woke up, a piece of bread lay next to me and a jug of water stood at my side (Pies, 1966, p. 52).

Apparently, bread and water was his total diet. Although there was very little or no interaction and communication between Casper Hauser and his keeper(s) to whom he later referred to as "thee", his basic physical needs were met. Pies (1966, p. 56) relates: "To alter Casper Hauser's appearance, he was first of all given a sleeping drought in his water and upon waking he noticed the other clothes he had been given and that his hair and nails had been cut." His movements were restricted. He could not stand up because he was fastened to the wall by a belt which only permitted him to move his body slightly to the left or to the right. He lived in complete isolation, without people, sunlight and proper food and drink. He was deprived of experiences, love, and communication with the outer world.

No one really knows why he was released from his prison, or who his keeper(s) was. After Casper Hauser's release and brief internment in the tower of Nurnberg, he was given a home with and educated by Professor. Frederick Daumer, a Gymnasium teacher. Daumer discovered that he could not digest anything but bread and water; meat and wine disgusted him and made him severely ill. As a result of his isolation, his senses were extremely acute. Daumer conducted a number of experiments with Casper Hauser and found he could see perfectly in the dark and could distinguish green from blue. He could read the number of a house at a distance of 180 feet after sunset that others could not read at that distance in daylight. Loud noises made him desperate. Strong odors were repulsive to him. Flowering tobacoo in a field fifty feet away gave him headaches and attacks of fever. Perfumes made him ill. He could differentiate a pear, apple and plum tree at a considerable distance by the scent of their leaves.

Casper Hauser was also sensitive to magnetism and metals. He could differentiate between the south and north pole of a magnet through feeling the magnetic field; the north pole felt less pleasant than the south pole. Additional experiments conducted by Daumer and others demonstrated that Casper Hauser could distinguish between and describe gold, steel, brass and silver objects hidden under a paper by color radiation and by moving his fingers over the paper without touching it.

During the first months after his release, he could not distinguish between animate and inanimate objects. At the outset he had no stereoscopic vision and could not recognize the sun or the moon. He had no understanding of near and far; he called distant objects small. His sleeping patterns were highly influenced by the sun. He fell asleep when the sun set and woke when it rose.

Casper Hauser had a friendly, amicable and trustful personality. His pleasant demeanor had a taming effect on animals. Cats, dogs, horses and some wild animals approached him without fear or anger. But caged animals and birds depressed him. Daumer (Pies, 1966), his foster parent and tutorer, writes:

> Hauser is in every respect the image of complete morality, chastity and innocence. He has a charming amiability which conquers every heart . . . he would never hurt the smallest insect, and he has a deep aversion against anything that would cause pain to a man or an animal. He is filled with obedience and good will, and free of any naughtiness or bad habits (p. 53).

Under Daumer's tutoring, Casper Hauser quickly learned to speak, write, read and do arithmetic. He even wrote poetry. His memory was remarkable. He had an indefatigable eagerness to learn, but he wanted to understand things on his own and be convinced by external proof. If the subject could be substantiated with concrete proof, Casper Hauser could easily learn it. However, he never did understand religion or who God was despite the efforts of Daumer and numerous clergymen to convince him.

As a consequence of his formal education, the change of diet and the increasing pressures on him to show what he could do and to prove his origin, Casper Hauser lost his unusual sensorial gifts, curiosity and his remarkable affinity to animals. He became depressed, unhappy and mediocre in his achievements. Daumer noted that when Casper Hauser's diet was changed to include meat, there was a direct consequence. "He lost

some of his faculties, the intensity of vitality receded and made room for an evergrowing indifference. His receptivity also decreased and his hearing was less acute" (Stibbe, 1938, p. 15).

Casper Hauser was under constant pressure to participate in Daumer's experiments. He was continuously on exhibition and the center of the political controversy regarding his origin (which will be discussed later).

What is interesting at this point is Casper Hauser's miraculous recovery after sixteen years of complete isolation. There is every indication that he was placed in isolation shortly after birth. Casper Hauser was born on September 12, 1812 to Grand Duchess Stephanie Beuharnais of Badan. For political reasons, the baby was stolen; a sick infant, which died on October 16, 1812, was substituted (Konig, 1961).

How did he survive sixteen years of isolated incarceration? The fact that he did not walk, talk or think, and that he was somber, motorically passive and fearful, indicate he had very little or no contact or intercourse with human beings at the outset of his incarceration. Yet several years after his release, he had seemingly recovered.

His recovery does not fit the rules of human development. He lived in and passed through the Piaget (1962), stages of development simultaneously. His rapid absorption of languages and propensity for imitation shows that he was in the sensory motor preoperational stages (0-7 years). His quick mastering of reading and writing and numbers is indicative of his attainment of the concrete operational stage (7-14 years). His quest for independent learning and understanding with empherical confirmation demonstrates a level of formal operational thinking (14 . . . years).

7

It is difficult to explicate how Casper Hauser overcame his deprivation, when there are hundreds of cases that show that the effects of early and continual isolation on infants are irreversible.

CASES OF EARLY ISOLATION AND DEPRIVATION:

Historical and recent cases of infant isolation from other human beings show the mortality rate to be high even when given normal human care later on.

Some classic cases have been the "Wolf children of India" (Singh, 1966), "Wild Peter of Hanover" (Zingg, 1942), and the "Wild boy of Averyon" (Itard, 1962). The two wolf-children, reared by wolves, and wild Peter and the wild boy lived in a cave and/or wilderness on their own resources during the formative years of their childhoods (however, no one really knows), like animals. They possessed no speech, no intellectual attributes, nor any of the emotional and social propensities of civilized man. (In fact, the wolf-children walked on all fours.) Shortly after their exposure to civilization and extensive unsuccessful attempts to acculturate them, they died. They failed to recover from their early isolation in spite of the fact they were relatively young, ranging in ages from one and one-half to twelve years. Casper Hauser's recovery is more of an enigma, when current research on the effects of early isolation is examined. According to Montagu (1970), Bawkin and Bawkin (1942, Spitz (1949), and others, healthy development of children is dependent not only on their physical needs being met, but on intimate relationships with another human being. Montagu explains:

> The mere satisfaction of (a baby's) physical needs will not bring about such development (psychological and spiritual) — it may secure survival, but in too many cases, it is doubtful whether it will secure that . . . . We know that babies which are physically well-nurtured may nevertheless waste away and die unless they are loved (p. 464).

A number of studies show a high mortality rate of institutionalized infants during the first and second year of life. During the first decades of this century, the majority of infants under one year of age who entered hospitals and infant asylums died. Chapin (1915), found in ten infant asylums in the United States, ninety-nine percent of the infants less than two years of age died. Hamil (Chapin 1915), found the mortality rate of infants less than one year old, retained in a Philadelphia institution for any length of time, to be one hundred percent. Bawkin and Bawkin's (1942), discovered that prolonged residence in a hospital made infants apathetic and unhappy; their appetite was poor, they failed to gain weight and were prone to contract secondary illnesses such as colds and fevers.

Spitz (1949), compared a foundling home and a nursery that had equal physical facilities and support services — housing, food, sepsis, and hygiene. The only difference between the institutions was the amount of tender loving care given the infants. In the foundlinghome there was minimal personal care because of the high nurse/infant ratio. In the nursery mothers cared for their own infants. After a year, the I.Q. of the

foundlinghome infants dropped from 124-72; they had not learned to walk, speak or to feed themselves. There was a thirty-seven percent mortality after two years of residence. In contrast, the average I.Q. of the nurser infants rose from 101.5 to 105. They learned to walk, speak and to feed themselves, and the mortality rate was zero.

Powell, Brasel and Blizzard (1967), who evaluated thirteen children with physical growth retardation, found a correlation between emotional deprivation and growth retardation. When the children were moved to a more conducive socio-emotional environment, where they had a heavy dose of "tender loving care" of a nurse, they began to grow again. When returned to their deleterious home environment, the children's growth stopped or slowed down.

In light of these studies and others, it is difficult to evaluate Casper Hauser's unusual recovery. One explanation may be that although Casper Hauser was incarcerated from the first year of life until the age of sixteen, he may have been physically fondled, fed or nursed on demand, with no verbal communication or other interaction with his keeper(s). There is some recent evidence that may support this theory.

Kagan (1973), studied the effects of complete isolation on Guatemalan infants during the first two years of their lives. By custom, the infants were kept in a dark hut, with no contact with any persons, except physical contact with the mother who nursed them on demand. There was no conversation or other interaction between the infants and the mothers during these initial years of life. There were no toys or play objects. After two years the infants emerged from confinement, motorically and emotionally passive and intellectually retarded. (Guatemalan children begin

to talk at two and a half to three years of age.) Kagan (1973), then observed and tested the eleven year olds in the village, who had gone through the same rearing process. He found them to be perfectly normal, "gay, alert, active and affective" (p. 41).

Perhaps, the conditions that permitted the Guatemalan children to develop normally from a retarded state of development at age two, parallel those of Casper Hauser? Perhaps intimate physical contact between mother and infant in the first years is a greater determinant of an infant's well being than verbal and other forms of human intercourse? Montagu (1970), supports this thesis when he speaks of the instinctive love between the new born baby and the mother. The effect is reciprocal; the baby's feeding habits are established and there is a healthy development of all the sustaining systems of the baby.

The mother's hemmoraging and maternal uterus is reduced and rejection of the placenta takes place sooner.

On the other hand, there may be no rational explanation for Casper Hauser's enigmatic development. Perhaps, Casper Hauser was a unique and gifted individual, or he may be the representative of what man can be when uneffected by a social environment. Man is not only a product of his environment, but, in a real sense, he is also the victim of the quantity of the environment. However the quality may have the greatest nurturing effect of all.

CASPER HAUSER'S ORIGIN

After more than a hundred years, Casper Hauser remains an enigma not only in terms of his rise and sudden death, but also his origin. Many theories

have been examined. The theory that appears to have the greatest credibility is his relationship to the Court of Baden. In the last ten years, it has been fairly well documented that Casper Hauser was the first son of the Grand Duches Stephanie Beuharnais, the niece of Josephine, Napoleon's I first wife (Pies, 1966). Napoleon took a liking to Stephanie and adopted her as his daughter.

In 1806, Napoleon gave her to the Grand Duke Karl Baden in marriage. After six years of marriage, they had their first son, who is thought to have been Casper Hauser. As indicated, several days after his birth, the newly born crown-prince was stolen and a sick child substituted, which died a month later. This apparently common eighteenth century intrigue was allegedly carried out by Countess Hachberg of the House of Morgan, the second wife of the previous Grand Duke Charles Frederick, the grandfather of Karl of Baden (father of Casper Hauser).

Stephanie, who belonged to the rival House Zaehringer, had a great deal of influence with Napoleon and numerous ruling families of Europe. Her first son (Casper Hauser), would have inherited those political liaisons and a great deal of power, when he ascended the Throne of Baden. If there were no heirs to the Throne of the House of Zaehringer, another House would succeed to the Throne. Apparently Countess Hachberg made the substitution to secure succession to the Throne for her own sons. The plan succeeded. Stephanie and Karl had eight children, four daughters and four sons. All the daughters lived, but all the sons mysteriously died soon after birth. Hence, there were no heirs to the Throne. It is alleged that Casper Hauser died on October 16, 1812. His father Grand Duke Karl died in 1818; his uncle Ludwig became his successor, ruling until 1830. The male line of the House of Zaehringer became extinct.

In 1830, Casper Hauser was living in Nurnberg, but in 1831 was moved to the more secluded village of Ansbach, where he would be out of the headlines and publicity surronding him in the capital of Nurnberg. Evidence regarding Casper Hauser's royal lineage began to mount. Anselem von Feuerbach, an upper appellate court judge and well known criminologist, published a pamphlet, "Kasper Hauser, An Example of Crime on the Soul of Man." This publication, which caused a political furor throughout Germany, exposed with detailed facts and lucid logic the royal origin of Casper Hauser (Fevosa, 1936). A year later Feuerbach and his collaborators mysteriously died. Many voices were heard from the members of the House of Zaehringer and related Houses throughout Europe supporting Casper Hauser's right to the throne. However, the anti-Napoleon political climate, together with the whole movement of the Vienna Congress of 1815, suppressed the pro Casper Hauser voices.

The growing rumors that Casper Hauser was the crown prince of Baden led to several unsuccessful attempts on his life and finally his demise in Ansbach in 1833. On his grave the inscription reads:

> Here rests Casper Hauser--the enigma of his time; of unknown birth, of sudden death" (Stibbe, 1938, p. 21).

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